

IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the present application:

1. (Currently amended) In an online comparison system, a method of ranking prospective merchants comprising:

entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of merchant comparison information data;

receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase;

receiving a plurality of merchant comparison information data for a plurality of merchants ~~capable of~~ related to completing the potential consumer purchase, the merchant comparison information data for a merchant organized into a plurality of categories, wherein the merchant comparison information data includes non-opinion data from at least two categories from: price category, product availability category, product inventory category, time to deliver product category, payment terms category, payment method category, merchant creditworthiness category, and inventory category information;

~~entering a set of weighting factors prior to receiving information related to a potential customer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to the categories of merchant comparison information data;~~

calculating a plurality of respective merchant data weight resultant ~~value~~
values by:

(i) for each entered weighting factor, multiplying a ~~weighting~~
~~factor~~ one weighting factor from the entered set of weighting
factors against one data value from ~~the merchant comparison~~
~~information data~~ of the corresponding merchant data category[[]],
and

(ii) calculating an aggregate score for the merchant by summing the
plurality of calculated merchant data weight resultant values; ~~and~~
ranking merchants based on the merchant aggregate score; and
returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants
corresponding to the received query information.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting information from a consumer relating to a potential consumer
purchase.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2, further comprising:

providing the ranking to the consumer in response to the consumer's response to the request for information relating to a potential consumer purchase.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3, further comprising:

below a specified threshold excluding a merchant from the ranking when the merchant receives a aggregate score.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting weighting factor information from a consumer; and

using the consumer entered weighting factor information in the calculation of the respective merchant data weight resultant value.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.

7. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the weighting factors are balanced such that the weighting factors sum to a predetermined value.

8-9. (Canceled)

10. (Withdrawn) A system of providing comparisons between at least two products, comprising:

means for receiving a search query for a product;

means for retrieving from a database information on merchants offering to sell the product specified in the search query;

means for retrieving from a database merchant comparison information relating to the specified product and the merchants offering the specified product, the merchant comparison information specifying objective, non-opinion data on the specified product or the merchant offering the specified product;

means for entering weighting factors corresponding to merchant and product information;

means for multiplying weighting factors against the corresponding retrieved merchant and product information;

means for calculating a merchant aggregate value from the multiplying of the weighting factors against the corresponding merchant and product information;

means for generating a ranking of the merchants based on the merchant aggregate value;

means for applying screening factors to the retrieved merchant and product information to remove those merchants from the ranking which correspond to the screening criteria; and

means for providing the ranking to a consumer.

11. (Withdrawn) The comparison system of claim 10, further comprising:

means for presenting the weighting factors to the consumer;

means for providing the consumer with the ability to specify weights associated with items of merchant and product information; and

means for using the weights in generating the ranking of merchants.

12. (Withdrawn) The comparison system of claim 10, further comprising:

means for calculating a rating of the merchant's offerings of the specified product; and

means for displaying the rating of the merchant's offerings.

13. (Withdrawn) The comparison system of claim 12, wherein the rating is based on the relative difference between the aggregate scores of different merchants.

14. (Currently amended) A method of ranking prospective merchants in an online comparison system, comprising the steps of:

entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase of a user specified product;

receiving query information relating to [[a]] said user specified product;

retrieving a list of merchants from a database, wherein the list of merchants includes merchants offering the said user specified product;

retrieving merchant specific information about the merchants in said list of merchants, said merchant specific information including a plurality of merchant data entry values, the merchant data entry values specifying non-opinion data;

~~entering a set of weighting factors, wherein the entering occurs prior to receiving information relating to a user specified product;~~

applying weighting factors to said merchant specific information, said application including:

(i) for each entered weighting factor, for a plurality of data entry values, multiplying [[at]] the data entry value by at least one weighting factor from the set of weighting factors to calculate a merchant data weight resultant value;

(ii) summing a plurality of merchant data weight resultant values to calculate a merchant aggregate score;
ranking said list of merchants carrying ~~the~~ said user specified product based on the calculated merchant aggregate scores; and
returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding to said user specified product.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein the weighting factors are chosen by the user from a preset grouping of weighting factors.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein the weighting factors are entered by the user.

17-19. (Canceled)

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of eliminating those merchants from the ranking where the merchant specific information is incomplete for that merchant.

21. (Currently amended) The method of claim 20, wherein the elimination occurs only for merchants whose merchant specific data is incomplete as compared to a predefined screening ~~criteria~~ criterion.

22. (Currently amended) The method of claim 21, wherein the predefined screening ~~criteria~~ criterion is received from the user.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of excluding from the ranking comparison information items not common to all merchants in the ranking.

24-26. (Canceled)

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

presenting the user with a list of merchant information categories;

receiving user selected merchant information categories; and

ranking merchants based upon the selected information categories.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, further comprising the steps of:

presenting the user with a list of merchant information categories;

receiving user selected merchant information categories; and

ranking merchants based upon the selected information categories.

29. (Canceled)

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

receiving category weighting factors from the user, wherein category weighting factors are applied to all comparison information corresponding to the category in the merchant specific information; and

ranking merchants according to the received category weighting factors.

31-35. (Canceled)

36. (Currently amended) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

~~receiving~~ ~~entering~~ a set of weighting factors ~~prior to receiving query~~
~~information specifying a product or service~~, the weighting factors corresponding
to categories of merchant comparison information, wherein the weighting factor
is entered as a numerical value and represents the relative importance given the
corresponding merchant comparison information in ranking the merchants;

~~receiving query information related to~~ ~~entering a query specifying a~~
product or service;

retrieving merchant comparison information data from a database, the
retrieved merchant comparison information data corresponding to the entered
query, the merchant comparison information excluding opinion data or survey
result data;

calculating a merchant score by:

(i) ~~for a plurality of entered weighting factors~~, multiplying a weighting
factor by a corresponding data value from the retrieved merchant
comparison information to calculate a weighted category score~~[[:]]~~ , ~~and~~

(ii) ~~summing the weighted category scores to calculate a merchant overall~~
score; ~~and~~

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant overall score;

~~and~~

returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding to the received query information.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 36, wherein the step of entering the weighting factors occurs prior to entering the query.

38. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 36, wherein the step of entering the weighting factors is performed by a user, the user also entering the query.

39. (Currently amended) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

selecting a weighting factor prior to receiving query information specifying a product or service, the weighting factors corresponding to merchant comparison information;

receiving query information related to ~~entering a query specifying a~~ product or service;

retrieving merchant comparison information from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information corresponding to the entered query;

calculating a merchant score by:

- (i) for each of the elected weighting factors, multiplying the selected weighting factor by a data value from the retrieved merchant information to calculate a weighted category score, and
- (ii) summing the weighted category scores to calculate the merchant score;
~~and~~

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant score,
wherein the retrieved merchant comparison information excludes information obtained from surveys or specifying the opinion of a person; and
returning the ranking of merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding to the query specifying a product or service.

40. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the step of selecting the weighting factors occurs prior to entering the query.

41. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the step of selecting the weighting factors is performed by a user, the user also entering the query.

42. (Currently amended) The method of claim 39, wherein the weighting factors ~~is selecting~~ are selected from a list of weighting factors.

43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors corresponds to the merchant information.
44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the selection is made from a drop down list of weighting factors.
45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the user may modify the selected weighting factors to enter a weighting factor not included in the list of weighting factors.
46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors is entered by a consumer.
47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the list of weighting factors is selected from a group of lists of weighting factors.
- 48-55. (Canceled)